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RUEHDR/AMEMBASSY DAR ES SALAAM 1215  
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RUEHKI/AMEMBASSY KINSHASA 0541  
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 0318  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L KIGALI 000631

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [PHUM](#) [RW](#)  
SUBJECT: FIRST WE TAKE POWER, THEN WE SHARE IT - THE RPF  
WINS BIG VICTORY IN ELECTIONS

Classified By: CDA Cheryl Sim for Reason 1.4 (b) (d)

Summary  
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¶1. (C) On September 15, at polling stations nationwide the ruling Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) won well over 90 percent of the vote, as witnessed by hundreds of local and international observers. At these polling stations, the Liberal Party (PL) and Social Democratic Party (PSD) consistently polled less than the 5 percent needed to win seats in the Chamber of Deputies. Many polling stations opened early, failed to seal ballot boxes, did not make proper use of forms, and transmitted results in non-transparent conditions. Observers were unable to properly follow the "consolidation" of vote totals at higher levels. The National Electoral Commission (NEC) announced on September 17 that the RPF had won 79 percent of the vote, the PSD 13 percent, and the PL 7.5 percent, leaving many observers with the impression that vote totals had been adjusted, to allow PL and PSD participation in the Parliament. The conflicting reports of vote totals, and the overwhelming advantages of the RPF in the field, suggest that the ruling party engineered the end result to achieve an overriding goal -- power-sharing as a function of ruling party largesse. End summary.

At the Polling Stations: Early Start, Procedures Muddled  
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¶2. (C) In the 15,000 polling stations, gathered in 2000 polling centers (usually schools, with several polling stations spread among the various classrooms), Rwandan voters stood peacefully, and voted in a calm and orderly manner throughout the morning hours. Many polling stations opened before the official opening hour of 6:00 am, as local communities vied to be the first in their area to open their stations and "mobilize" their populations to vote. Many stations did not use or used incorrectly the opening forms meant to record ballots received, voters on file, and time of opening. Most ballot stations did not seal their ballot boxes, but merely set the lid atop the clear plastic boxes. However, polling station workers conscientiously verified voter cards against voter registers (although they rarely asked to see separate photo ID cards). Voters cast their ballots in secrecy behind wicker or woven screens, had their fingers dabbed with indelible ink, and left.

¶3. (C) At mid-morning, after many voters had already voted and following mounting questions from various observer missions, the NEC headquarters in Kigali issued instructions

to seal the ballot boxes (with plastic ties already on site). Many but far from all stations did so; many did so haphazardly or incorrectly. Moreover, observers had by then witnessed or received scattered reports of child voting, local officials intruding in the voting centers, and/or persons deprived of their voting cards, with others voting for them. In virtually all ballot stations, RPF observers were present, but hardly any PSD or PL observers (PSD officials told us their observers had been sought out and dissuaded from attending by the RPF).

¶4. (C) Turnout in many polling stations approached 100 percent. Observers continued to receive reports of local communities hustling to turn out voters, to impress local officials (who usually double as RPF cadres). By noon, however, the voting was largely over, with hours of listless waiting ahead for the polling station workers; official closing time was 3:00 pm, with 4:00 pm set aside for the actual count (the dead hour of time between 3:00 and 4:00 pm was never clearly explained by the NEC -- supposedly it was for "refreshment").

#### First Count: The RPF Polls in the High Nineties

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¶5. (C) When the count began at 4:00 pm, observers across the nation (including the seven-team USG observer mission) watched as ballots were counted openly, and the RPF ran up vote totals in the high nineties in polling station after polling station. Results of 100 percent for the RPF were not uncommon. Results often came in at 99 percent, 98 percent, 96 percent (in one station, the USG team recorded a low of 77 percent). The PL and PSD commonly polled at one or two percent. Standing in one primary school, pol/econ chief watched hundreds of ballots sorted, with every vote for the RPF, and voices on all sides of him in adjacent classroom polling stations monotonously intoning, "RPF, RPF, RPF" over and over and over. The final tally at his polling center: RPF 3461, PL 21, and PSD 9.

#### Consolidation of Votes: Entirely Non-Transparent

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¶6. (C) After counting votes at polling stations and adding them up in the centers, the votes were supposed to be "consolidated" at cell, sector, district, and provincial offices, and finally the national NEC headquarters. This consolidation process was by all accounts entirely non-transparent, and purposefully so. Various observer missions that attempted to follow the votes vertically found it impossible to do so. Said one EU observer mission official, "they used every trick in the book to keep us from following the counting." She then listed various, often impromptu methods: stopping observers from entering consolidation centers, reporting results over the telephone without bothering to open envelopes of results, tucking results under one's arm and sprinting away, and giving incorrect locations for the next consolidation center. At one sector-level consolidation center, the result was RPF 8167, PL 12 and PSD 5.

#### Partial Final Results: RPF Wins Big, But Not Too Big

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¶7. (C) On September 16, the NEC Chairman Chrysologue Karangwa announced "partial, preliminary results." With 4,697,689 persons having voted out of 4,769,228 registered voters (a 98.5 percent turnout), he announced the RPF (and its six miniature coalition partners) had won 78.76 percent of the vote, followed by 13.12 percent for the PSD, and 7.5 percent for the PL (one independent candidate won 0.6 percent). Each party had received over five percent, the threshold for representation in the Chamber of Deputies, and for partial government funding of election expenses. Of the 53 seats at stake, the RPF had won 42, with 7 for the PSD and 4 for PL. With 24 seats allocated to women in indirect

elections, and three seats for youth and the disabled, a total of 80, the RPF had taken one more than the 41 seat needed to control the Chamber (although of the 24 women's seats, most will be held by RPF sympathizers). Observers from various diplomatic and election-monitoring missions gathered briefly outside the NEC building afterwards to quietly express surprise or amusement at the reduced RPF totals.

Better than 2003?

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18. (C) The RPF polled slightly better than in the last national elections in 2003, when it won 74 percent of the vote. The PSD also did slightly better, having taken 12.31 percent previously. The PL fell from its 10.56 percent share in 2003. In some ways the conduct of the campaign and election was also better -- seemingly no violence at all, only one or two reports of brief arrests during the campaign, and troubling but only scattered reports of voter card misappropriation, or local official interference in the voting stations. The unsealed ballot boxes seems to have been the result of poor instructions from the NEC rather than been the result of poor instructions from the NEC rather than an attempt to subvert the balloting -- many local officials were genuinely confused on this and other points of electoral procedure. However, the consolidation process was entirely opaque, as NEC officials essentially froze out the various observer teams. One EU observer mission official said later, "it was all so stupid, as the RPF was winning easily." The EU team later observed in its low-key "Statement of Preliminary Findings," released September 17, "Procedural safeguards and transparency of the vote counting and consolidation process need to be substantially enhanced in order to meet international best practices."

Comment: First We Take Power, Then We Share It

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19. (C) Perhaps the RPF was not as "stupid" as the EU observer believed. At the final Kigali RPF rally, on September 13, Deputy RPF Chairman Christophe Bazivamo took the stage before several thousand cheering supporters in a downtown sports stadium to declare that, "We the RPF are in favor of power-sharing. First, we take the power, then, we share it." These elections suggest that the RPF followed just that strategy: first securing an absolutely overwhelming victory, to strike home to the Rwandan population and other political formations just how dominant a position it enjoys. Then, with extra votes to spare, and a compliant NEC to do its bidding, it apportioned the electoral results among the two small parties that did not join its coalition, to keep them small, still visible but submissive members of Parliament. Did the RPF initially pad its vote count by stuffing unsealed ballot boxes, or by simply making everyone aware, all over the country, through its many cadres closely organized in every village, in every cell, in every sector, that everyone was expected to vote for the ruling party? The latter seems the more likely and more troubling conclusion. Such is power-sharing in Rwanda today -- entirely a function of ruling party largesse. End comment.

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